

Fam.

1594

Misc.

The Old South Meeting-House
Boston



1729

The History of the Old South

(The following was written by William Everett in 1876, when it was planned to sell the Old South Meeting-house, and the land under it separately, with a provision that the Meeting-house must be torn down. The movement, in which what is written below was of great assistance, was successful, and the Old South Meeting-house was saved for us all.)

HERE was the garden originally granted to *John Winthrop*, the great governor; and *here* he died, 26th March, 1649.

Here, after Winthrop's death, lived *Rev. John Norton*, chosen by John Cotton on his death-bed, as his successor, and called by Cotton Mather "the chief of our burning and shining lights." *Here* he died 6th April, 1663.

Here, in John Norton's household, was bred *Increase Mather*, to whom New England and Harvard College owe so much.

Here was built, in 1669, the first house of worship of the *Third or Old South Church*, which withdrew from the *First Church*, to provide a more liberal entrance into the Church, and consequently a wider civil franchise. *This ground* was given them by Madam Mary Norton.

Here Sir Edmund Andros forcibly caused the Episcopal form of worship to be celebrated.

Here, in the *Old House*, in 1696, Judge Sewall stood up in his pew, while his confession of contrition was read for his share in the witchcraft delusion of 1692.

In 1691, Josiah Franklin was allowed to build in the neighborhood, and on Jan. 17, 1706, *here*, in the *old meeting-house*, Benjamin Franklin was baptized.

Here, [perhaps] in the same year, a town-meeting was held to consult on fortifying the harbor against an expected French invasion.

In March, 1729, the *old cedar meeting-house*, which had stood for two generations, was pulled down; a new one of brick was begun forthwith, and *here*, on the 26th April, 1730, was dedicated *this meeting-house*, the existing Old South. It was built according to the best taste of the time, and forcibly recalls Sir Christopher Wren's churches. The inside has undergone repairs and renovations, as have the contemporary College Halls at Cambridge and any buildings of that age that have received equally rough usage. These repairs have always strictly preserved its character.

In this building, in October, 1746, at the rumor of the coming of D'Anville's fleet, Rev. Thomas Prince, the pastor, and a historical scholar of the first eminence, prayed the Almighty's help—

“And even as I prayed
The answering tempest came;
It came with a mighty power,
Shaking the windows and walls,
And tolling the bell in the tower
As it tolls at funerals.
The fleet it overtook,
And the broad-sails in the van
Like the tents of Cushan shook,
Or the curtains of Midian.
Down on the reeling decks,
Crashed the o’erwhelming seas,—
O never were there wrecks
So terrible as these.”—*Longfellow.*

When the colonies came into collision with Great Britain, and Faneuil Hall proved repeatedly too small for the town-meetings of the patriots, they were adjourned *here*, and an “Old South meeting” became famous to Chatham and Burke.

In this House, on June 14, 1768, *James Otis* being moderator, a meeting was held to compel Governor Bernard to remove from the harbor a war vessel, stationed to enforce the odious impressment and customs laws.

In this House, in March, 1770, after the Boston massacre, an overflowing town-meeting waited till night, while *Samuel Adams* went back and forward to the State House till Hutchinson yielded and withdrew the regiments.

In this House, on Nov. 29, 1773, a meeting of five thousand citizens resolved that the tea should not be landed, and *in this House*, on Dec. 16, 1773, a meeting of several thousand citizens sat till after candlelight listening to *Josiah Quincy, Jr.*, and *Samuel Adams*, while messenger after messenger went to get redress of Hutchinson, at Milton. He refused, and *at the doors of this House* the war-whoop was raised, the citizens disguised as savages led the way to the tea-ships, and the tea was destroyed.

Here, June 27, 1774, the tories attempted to capture a town-meeting in the interests of Gage and the Boston Port-bill, censure the *Committee of Correspondence*, and nip the *Continental Congress* in the bud, and it sat for two days, ending in the triumph of the patriots and the sustaining of the Committee.

Here were delivered the series of orations from 1771 to 1775, commemorative of the Boston Massacre, by Lovell, Warren, Church, Hancock, and for the second time by *Joseph Warren*, three months before he was killed at Bunker Hill. He was introduced through a window in the rear of the pulpit, the aisles and steps of the pulpit being filled with British soldiers and officers.

Here, in 1775, by order of General Burgoyne, a riding school for British troops was established, pews and pulpits being torn away and broken up; and when *Washington* made his triumphal entry into Boston, in March, 1776, he paused, and entering *this building*, looked down from the eastern gallery on the scene of desolation.

Here, finally, for a long number of years, had been preached the annual election sermon before the governor and legislature of Massachusetts.

The *ground* where the Old South stands,—the *old meeting-house*, first built there, and the *present meeting-house*—have been the scene of some of the greatest crises, guided by some of the greatest men in our history. We want to keep on *this ground*, where such things happened, *this building*, in which such men worked.

WILLIAM EVERETT.

The interior was restored in 1783, and the South Church congregation continued to worship here until the great fire of 1872.

In 1874 the South Church congregation removed to and occupied the church in Copley Square. Thereafter, in 1876, the Meeting-house was sold at auction for \$1,350, with a provision that it should be torn down and removed within sixty days. It was intended to sell the land separately for \$400,000. On the Centennial of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1876, a "Town Meeting" was called in the Meeting-house to protest. Speeches were made by Wendell Phillips and others. A Preservation Committee was formed, headed by the Governor.

The building and land were bought by the women of the State, and the Old South was saved and since 1877 has been held as a historical monument and a place for patriotic inspiration and instruction. It is owned by the Old South Association in Boston, a corporation specially chartered to preserve it.

Among the many objects of interest in the Old South loan collection are:

Joseph Warren's christening cap

Warren's day-book

"Tea Party" tea

The Prophet's Bowl from Tippecanoe

Musket from Battle of Lexington

Model of "Old Ironsides"

(Made by one of her crew)

Bone's miniature of Washington

Washington letters

Quilt from Martha Washington's dresses

Model of Boston in 1775

Old-time household furnishings

Manuscripts, broadsides and portraits